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1.932 Bureau of Agricultural Economics
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MANAGEMENT IMPROVEMENT STATEMENT

September 21, 1949

1949

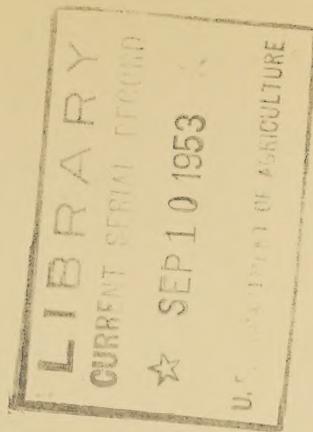
Estimate	Estimate
Man-Years	Man-Years
1950	1951

Items

I. General Subject: To improve and standardize practices and procedures in field offices.

A. Problem: The 41 field offices engaged in the preparation of agricultural estimates have diverse official interests and methods. No two are exactly alike and the extraordinarily heavy workload involving constant meeting of deadlines has discouraged the development of the most effective operating practices and procedures. There is variation in operating methods and effectiveness and considerable lack of uniformity in the way field offices maintain their records. Standardization of the system and disposition of inactive records are necessary to facilitate use of information to promote efficient utilization of equipment and relieve the crowded storage conditions.

B. Plan of Action: Several field offices have been surveyed by the head of another field office whose report focuses attention upon a number of specific problems. As a preliminary step preceding actual survey assistance from the management planning staff of the Bureau, a work and time report system has been reanalyzed and reinstated to provide improved performance and cost data. In addition to providing information needed for general budgetary and management purposes, the report should indicate which offices are in most immediate need of management assistance. It is planned that the field offices will be carefully surveyed by teams composed of management and program officials. The results of these surveys will be used to develop standardized practices including uniform records system, which we hope can be spelled out in an operating handbook. Through regional meetings of field office heads, it is planned to demonstrate the ways in which individual offices can improve their own techniques by use of work simplification methods and adoption of the standardized techniques. Assistance will then be given the offices in the installation of the improved procedures. This work is being undertaken now and probably will not be completed by June 30, 1951. It will be a joint responsibility of the management planning staff and the Agricultural Estimating service.





Estimate Man-Years	1951
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Estimate Man-Years	1950
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Items

II. General Subject: Recruitment of professional staff.

A. Problem: The BAE has been having considerable difficulty locating recent college graduates with the proper combination of training in agricultural subjects and statistics most needed for a career in statistics. Some graduates lack the required experience or training in agricultural subjects, others in statistics, and others in their understanding of research, methodology and techniques.

B. Plan of Action: In cooperation with the Departmental Office of Personnel, a student training aid program is being submitted to the colleges of agriculture in those cities where the Bureau has field offices which will, we hope, stimulate more interest in proper preparation for a career in the Bureau. The plan is that carefully selected students will be given part-time employment in the office of the State statistician during their junior, senior, or graduate years, and full-time employment during the summer vacation period. Such students will be expected to take the mathematics, statistics, and agricultural courses suggested by the Bureau so that upon graduation they will have the number of semester hours in those subjects necessary to meet the qualifications established by the Bureau and the Civil Service Commission. It is also planned to expand the intern training program and to conduct within the Bureau and with the cooperation of the Graduate School specific courses aimed at improving the techniques of the division's professional staff. The Personnel Division of the Bureau will have the responsibility for the activity, but will be assisted by the program divisions of the Bureau.

0.2

III. General Subject: Maximum utilization of survey and statistical tabulation section.

A. Problem: It is essential that the Bureau maintain a machine tabulation section for the purpose of recording and tabulating results of the many surveys conducted by the Bureau research staff. While these surveys are somewhat sporadic in nature, most of them do require tabulation of the results within a limited time. While it is not possible to maintain a staff of sufficient size to meet the maximum peak load, it is equally not efficient to release personnel and equipment during occasional slack

Items

	Estimate Man-Years	Estimate Man-Years
1950		1951

periods and then attempt to recruit new people and acquire new equipment when the work picks up again.

B. Plan of Action: The staff of the Administrative Services Division of the Bureau plans immediately a concerted effort toward the elimination of the wide variation in workload between the peaks and valleys. It is planned to explore the administrative and program functions of the Bureau with the aim of uncovering processes now being conducted by hand or other means which may be susceptible of conversion to mechanized equipment with a saving in operating costs. It is believed that through this study and through performance of such work for other agencies upon request, the workload of the survey and statistical tabulation section can be regularized so that the Bureau is not faced with the necessity for reducing and augmenting the staff. 0.3

B. Plan of Action: The staff of the Administrative Services Division of the Bureau plans immediately a concerted effort toward the elimination of the wide variation in workload between the peaks and valleys. It is planned to explore the administrative and program functions of the Bureau with the aim of uncovering processes now being conducted by hand or other means which may be susceptible of conversion to mechanized equipment with a saving in operating costs. It is believed that through this study and through performance of such work for other agencies upon request, the workload of the survey and statistical tabulation section can be regularized so that the Bureau is not faced with the necessity for reducing and augmenting the staff. 0.2

IV. General Subject: Project record designation system.

A. Problem: The subject matter covered by BAE correspondence covers a very wide range. Much confusion exists in files both in the divisions and in the central files of the Bureau.

B. Plan of Action: A system is being installed whereby all correspondence prepared throughout the Bureau will carry one of the Uniform Project System numbers or other file designation. This will place the responsibility for classifying record material in the appropriate division or section of the Bureau and will insure that the record keeping that is done in the Division on current work is kept in harmony with the central files to the end that duplicate records can be disposed of easily when the need for them has passed. New procedures are being devised for reducing the duplicate record keeping to the minimum consistent with efficient operation in the program divisions. 0.5

V. General Subject: Coordination of reports.

A. Problem: There are a large number of interrelated activities which require the submission of reports or justifications, some of which overlap or duplicate each other to some extent.

Items	Estimate Man-Years 1950	Estimate Man-Years 1951
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B. Plan of Action: Control files are being set up in the Budget Office covering project statements and proposals, and reports of working committees, etc. Procedures will be worked out for keeping BAE personnel informed of activities financed from regular funds, and of meetings and recommendations of RMA working groups and advisory committees and similar matters. These files will serve the whole Bureau and personnel will be advised on developments on projects in which they are interested. 0.5 0.5

VI. General Subject: To increase efficiency in statistical computations.

A. Problem: It is desirable that means be worked out for increasing the efficiency in the performance of statistical computations involved in multiple correlation analyses of agricultural time series. Development of improved methods for this work will reduce the time required to perform the necessary work.

B. Plan of Action: One of the members of the staff has developed on his own time a computing technique involving the use of a computation form to reduce the number of statistical operations involved and to increase the efficiency with which the necessary figures are posted. It is planned that during the next few months an experimental run of the new computing technique will be made upon problems of immediate concern to the Bureau. If the technique proves to be more efficient than the methods now in use, it will be adopted. Inasmuch as the testing of the technique will be on current work problems, the time consumed in the experiment will be negligible. It may be possible to devise other improved methods and a small amount of time should be devoted to exploratory work. 0.1 0.1

VII. General Subject: Conservation of printing funds.

A. Problem. Since approximately 60 percent of the printing funds available to the Bureau go into mailed questionnaires and similar job printing, and since prices for printing have been raised nearly every year since the war began,

<u>Items</u>	<u>Estimate</u> <u>Man-Years</u> <u>1950</u>	<u>Estimate</u> <u>Man-Years</u> <u>1951</u>
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it is necessary for us to search continually for ways to make more economical use of printing funds so that essential printing needs of the Bureau can be met and the program not be held back on this account.

B. Plan of Action: The staff of the Economic Information Division is constantly engaged in a thorough analysis of the best and most economical means of reproducing material used in promulgation of Bureau programs. They have experimented with a number of alternative methods of handling different types of material, and as a result a number of changes have been effected to reduce our costs. More attention will be given to increasing the percentage returns from crop schedules mailed out so that fewer schedules can be printed to get a given volume of replies.

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MANAGEMENT IMPROVEMENT STATEMENT

Continuing Activities Directed at Identifying Ways of Improving Service

Bureau of Agricultural Economics

September 21, 1949

The Bureau of Agricultural Economics has plans for a number of activities which do not lend themselves to presentation as specific projects. They cover a wide variety of subjects and affect most of the work of the Bureau. Much of the work aimed at improved program operation is of a type which is so closely connected with the primary functions of the Bureau that it will not be itemized herein. This memorandum sets forth below the activities which it is possible to construe as being outside of those functions for which the Bureau is considered responsible in the technical aspects of its work.

1. The Bureau is launching within the next few months a comprehensive program of management improvement. As a result of a recent reorganization in the administrative staff, a management planning position has been created and as soon as the proper person is recruited for this position, a series of studies will be instituted to effect better program operations wherever possible.

These studies will be carried out under the leadership of the management planning analyst, but with closely coordinated participation by the budget officer, the training officer, classification officer and other members of the administrative staff who can contribute to specific problems.

2. In order to secure participation of the technical staff in managerial matters, and to develop more interest in the management aspects of program operation, such as the development of under-studies, improvement in office techniques, proper placement, proper communication of pertinent information, all of which directly affect the total output of a unit, the Chief of the Bureau has just appointed a staff development committee who meet regularly to discuss operational problems and plans for meeting them. This group also serves as a review board for proposed projects and policies to be instituted by the management divisions in order to insure their usefulness and acceptability throughout the Bureau.
3. There is a continuing task of improving management of Bureau records. A program such as that of the BAE involves accumulation of large masses of data. The proper filing, locating and disposing of these records is a matter of considerable concern, both from the standpoint of the efficiency of day to day operations and the economical use of filing equipment and space. The Bureau employs a full-time records management analyst to conduct this work.
4. In maintaining its agricultural statistical program on a high level of accuracy in view of (1) changing and generally increasing operating costs, (2) current, anticipated, and ever increasing demands for agricultural statistical data, and (3) varying degrees of State cooperation, the Bureau must consider also the necessity for improved methodology. This involves taking advantage of unexplored or undeveloped areas of technical methodology and operating techniques.

Two permanent committees have been appointed to study these problems; one concerns itself with the general problem of program operation, while the other concerns itself with problems of methodology. Individually, the committees have already brought about definite improvement in streamlining Crop Reporting Board procedures and reports. Consideration is being given to further studies in improved methodology, particularly as concerned in the improvement of collecting data by mail in order to counteract the falling off in respondents and to develop more scientific techniques for the selection of respondents and the analysis of returns.

5. A large amount of time and funds are required in economic research to obtain the basic data with which analyses of problems are made. Ways and means of reducing or improving these data gathering efforts need continuous appraisal. The Bureau maintains a small staff of statisticians and economists in the Office of the Chief who have a continuing responsibility of analyzing statistical and research methods, and the Bureau's activities in these areas, to eliminate any possible duplication of effort between the BAE and other agencies, either in the Department of Agriculture or outside, who are concerned with development of economic data. This group also coordinates the use of statistical reporting forms and questionnaires and their clearance with the Bureau of the Budget.

This group and the persons responsible for specific programs have been experimenting with the Bureau of the Census and other agencies to find ways of making more use of material collected by one agency in the conduct of the programs of several. As an example, we propose to make use of the 1950 individual farm Census records to improve the basis for sample selection, to provide the descriptive data on type and size disposition of farms, crop acres and yield, livestock numbers, etc., to reduce the length of field schedules and make field enumeration more in the nature of special purpose surveys rather than collecting general information.

There has been some confusion in obtaining clearance on forms, statistical questionnaires and contracts used on cooperative contracts. Attention is now being given to a clarification of clearance requirements for forms and statistical questionnaires, the definition of items subject to amendment by the clearance agencies, provision for preliminary review by the clearance agencies, and completion of as much of the clearance as possible before sending documents out to cooperating agencies for final signatures.

